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Another Mozzarella di bufala Scandal

Report Categories:

Agriculture in the News

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Report Highlights:

The Italian Ministry of Agriculture has striped the consortium of *Mozzarella di bufala* (buffalo mozzarella) producers of the authority to certify the authenticity of their cheese and transferred that authority to the Ministry (under appointed administration) as part of its Zero Tolerance policy toward increasingly common Italian food frauds. The Ministry's decision follows investigations that reportedly revealed that producers were adulterating the cheese with cheaper cow's milk.

General Information:

Buffalo Mozzarella Consortium under Investigation

The Italian Ministry of Agriculture has striped the consortium of *Mozzarella di bufala* (buffalo mozzarella) producers of the authority to certify the authenticity of their cheese and transferred that authority to the Ministry (under appointed administration) as part of its Zero Tolerance policy toward increasingly common Italian food frauds. The Ministry's

decision follows investigations that reportedly revealed that producers were adulterating the cheese with cheaper cow's milk.

Production Regulations Violated

Mozzarella di bufala is one of Italy's top PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) products. By law, *Mozzarella di bufala* must be produced from whole buffalo milk only. In November 2008, inspectors at several leading supermarkets found that 25 percent of the cheese sold as *Mozzarella di bufala* was, in fact, fake because it had been adulterated with cow milk.

Ministry sources report that the investigation is still under way. Preliminary results show that about a quarter of the 530 samples contained cow milk—some as much as 30 percent. At present, no administrative or legal measures have been taken against individual producers. The Ministry considers this to be commercial scandal and does not believe it poses a health risk. (Note: Unless, of course, one were allergic to cow milk).

Third Scandal in a Year

This is the third scandal involving *Mozzarella di bufala* in the past year. As a result, sales and exports continue to plummet. In 2008, tests showed that some plants near Naples were producing the cheese with excessive levels of dioxin and other dangerous contaminants. Italian police also found that some of buffalo herds had been 'doped' using illegal hormones to increase milk production. Additionally, *Mozzarella di bufala* is not pasteurized and, despite a campaign to eradicate brucellosis, and estimated 25 percent of the Italian buffalo herd is brucellosis positive.

Future of the Industry

According to Coldiretti (Italian Farm Association) the *Mozzarella di bufala* industry employs more than 20,000 people, with 128 cheese producers, 1,850 dairy farms, and 250,000 buffalos. Approximately 5,000 tons of the 33,000 tons of the *Mozzarella di bufala* produced in Italy annually is exported. It is not clear what impact the current fraud may have. In 2008, the dioxin scare is estimated to have cost producers some €40 million (\$57 million).